

Remarks

Claims 1 and 4-6 are currently pending in this application.

In light of the amendments above and remarks below, Applicant respectfully requests reconsideration of this case and passage to issue.

The Examiner rejected claims 1-4 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Madrigal et al in view of Ward et al. Applicant has amended the independent claims to distinguish his invention from the prior art. In particular, Applicant claims an occupant protection system where “a portion of the air bag closing the opening when the air bag is deflated such that the air bag is visible when in the deflated state adjacent the opening.” The prior art does not show an air bag that closes the opening such that the air bag is visible when in the deflated state. Madrigal et al teaches a perforated paper cover 32 which encloses the folded air bag 10 and inflator 16. *See*, Madrigal et al, column 3, lines 48-99 and Figure 17. The air bag of Madrigal is not visible in the deflated state. It is covered. Ward discloses a door 26 for closing the opening. (*See*, Ward, Figure 1.) The air bag in Ward is also not visible when in the deflated state. It is also covered.

The Applicant respectfully disagrees with the Examiner’s statements that “the air bag skin itself could act as a cover, as taught by Madrigal.” (Office Action mailed March 27, 2002, Response to Argument.) The “skin” referred to by Applicant is the air bag itself. There is nothing else applied to or covering the air bag. Applicant has amended the independent claims to describe it as such. The Applicant does not add new material to the claim but merely rewrites it to more clearly state the invention.

Accordingly, Applicant contends that independent claims 1 and 4 and claims 5 and 6, which depend therefrom, are patentable over the cited prior art.

Response Under 37 C.F.R. § 1.116 -
Expedited Procedure - Examining Group

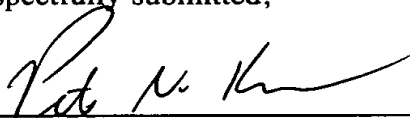
Claims 5 and 6 are separately patentable. The prior art does not show an air bag that is flush with the instrument panel. In Ward, a cover attached to the air bag is flush with the vehicle panel. The air bag itself is not flush. Madrigal does not show any feature of an air bag being flush with the air bag.

Accordingly, the Applicant contends that the application is in condition for allowance and respectfully requests passage to issue.

If the Examiner will find it helpful to discuss this case further, he is requested to contact the undersigned directly at 248-226-2705.

Respectfully submitted,

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Attachment



VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADE

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Please amend claims 1, 4, 5, and 6 as shown below.

1. (Twice Amended) An occupant protection system for deploying a deployable air bag from a concealed location in a vehicle instrument panel having an opening, the protection system comprising:

an air bag normally containable in a deflated condition adjacent the opening and deployable through the opening as a protection for the occupant; and

[the air bag having a skin and] a portion of [that skin closes] the air bag closing the opening when the air bag is deflated[, and remaining as a portion of the air bag after the air bag is deployed] such that the air bag is visible when in the deflated state adjacent the opening.

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4. (Twice Amended) In combination, a vehicle having an air bag deployable upon vehicle impact and an occupant protection system for deploying a deployable air bag from a concealed location in a vehicle instrument panel having an opening, the protection system comprising:

an air bag normally containable in a deflated condition adjacent the opening and deployable upon vehicle impact through the opening as a protection for the occupant; and

[the air bag having a skin and] a portion of [that skin closes] the air bag closing the opening when the air bag is deflated [and remaining as a portion of the air bag after the air bag is deployed] such that the air bag is visible when in the deflated state adjacent the opening.

5. (Amended) The occupant protection system of claim 1 wherein the [skin] air bag that closes the opening is flush with the vehicle instrument panel.

6. (Amended) The combination of claim 4 wherein the [skin] air bag that closes the opening is flush with the vehicle instrument panel.